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S P E E C H

OF

Hon. JOSEPH W. McCLURG,

OF MISSOURI.

Delivered in the House of Representatives,

March 23, 1864.

TO REFUTE THE CHARGE OF HIS COLLEAGUE (MR. BLAIR) OF FORGERY
ALLEGED BY HIM (MR. BLAIR) AGAINST B. R. BONNER,
TREASURY AGENT AT ST. LOUIS, MO.

WASHINGTON, D. C.
GIBSON BROTHERS, PRINTERS.
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DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
FIRST SESSION, THIRTY-EIGHTH CONGRESS,
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 23, 1864.

Mr. McCLURG rose and said—

Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that my colleague from the first district of Missouri [Mr. BLAIR] is not in his seat. If any of his friends know where he is I hope they will send for him.

Mr. Speaker, in my remarks on the 9th instant some reflections were cast upon the character of my colleague from the first district [Mr. BLAIR] by the inference being drawn that he was probably connected with what may have been a liquor speculation. I was interrupted by my colleague, and in reply I intimated I had no disposition to do him injustice, and, whenever satisfied that an error had been committed, that I would gladly retract. I desire therefore to make such explanation as will place all parties fairly before the public. I hope I will have unanimous consent.

Mr. Speaker, doubt may have remained on the minds of some as to the truth of the execution of a certain order for liquors by my colleague, [Mr. BLAIR,] a copy of which, with a corresponding invoice, was given in my speech of 9th instant. It will be recollected that my colleague, [Mr. BLAIR,] in one of his interruptions, seemed to be surprised that I had not seen the acknowledgment by a Treasury agent, Mr. Bonner, of St. Louis, that the order and invoice were forgeries, and that he, Mr. Bonner, knew them to be forgeries when they were published. I here quote the language of that interruption. It is as follows:

“Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I ask my colleague if he does not know that the order which he quoted here was a forgery committed by one of Mr. Chase’s agents, and that its publication was procured by another of Mr. Chase’s agents, who knew it to be a forgery, in a paper which was in the pay of Mr. Chase. The whole thing can be traced to malice and malevolence. It is acknowledged now to have been a forgery on the part of these two agents of Mr. Chase.

“I was in the field doing my duty when these miserable miscreants committed this forgery which the gentleman parades here. I suppose he has seen the denunciation of that pretended order as a forgery in a St. Louis paper, and he may have all the credit he can get for circulating the forgery of Mr. Chase’s agents.

“Mr. McCLURG. Will my colleague give us the name of the person he alludes to?

“Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I allude to Mr. Bonner.

"Mr. McCLEURG. I have seen the printed correspondence on this subject between the gentleman's friends and the friends of the Treasury Department, and I am confirmed in the belief that I have given the correct and fair interpretation of the whole matter. I shall, with great pleasure, at any time, acknowledge the error if the gentleman will convince me of it; but he does not convince me by the remarks he has now made.

"Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I tell the gentleman that I have the admission of Mr. Bonner himself that he knew it was a forgery at the time he published it.

"Mr. McCLEURG. If the gentleman will get his written admission and produce it to me, I will withdraw and retract what I have said about this matter."

My colleague [Mr. BLAIR] stated that Mr. Bonner acknowledged "he knew it was a forgery at the time he published it." I plainly intimated I did not so believe, but stated I would retract if, at any time, my colleague [Mr. BLAIR] would produce in writing such an acknowledgment from Mr. Bonner. The gentleman [Mr. BLAIR] has had time to procure that acknowledgment. Two weeks have elapsed, and in one week a letter is conveyed by mail to St. Louis and an answer returned. That acknowledgment has not been produced; it cannot be. I desire, Mr. Speaker, to remind those under the sound of my voice of one of the acknowledged principles in passing upon testimony and determining whether it should be admitted or rejected. It is this, when translated into English: "False in one, false in all." Therefore, one falsehood of a witness being exposed, the whole testimony of that witness is rejected as worthless.

The gentleman [Mr. BLAIR] has, on several occasions, appeared here as his own witness. I exposed the falsehood in the charge he made of duplicity and infidelity to the President against his four radical colleagues, when, in the face of his own language, he then acknowledged he did not intend to apply his remarks to the radicals of the House. I also produced the proof that decided in favor of his colleague from the second district [Mr. Blow] the question of veracity as to the gentleman's [Mr. BLAIR] having approved a resolution for a delegation to procure the appointment of another commander in Missouri than General Schofield. It is also borne in mind that not many days since it was denied by the gentleman [Mr. BLAIR] that slaves had been run off to Kentucky from Missouri; when at the same time a letter was produced from an officer stating that such was the fact. If not the fact, Major General Rosecrans must be exceedingly ingenious in framing orders for imaginary causes, in order that his name may appear in print; for the following is part of the first paragraph of General Orders No. 35, dated at St. Louis, March 1, 1864:

[General Orders, No. 35.]

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF THE MISSOURI, ST. LOUIS, March 1, 1864.

I. Missouri, for the coming year, needs all the slave and other labor she has within her own border. Humanity, as well as justice, forbids sending away to other States our helpless slaves. Moreover, bad men have been engaged in stealing and carrying negroes out of the State, and selling even those who were free. The exportation of negroes from Missouri is therefore prohibited.

By command of Major General Rosecrans.

O. D. GREENE, Assistant Adjutant General.

"Bad men have been engaged," &c., "selling even those who were free." Here, then, are three cases in which the statements of the gentleman [Mr. BLAIR] who testifies in his own cases are proven to be incorrect. Apply the principle, "false in one, false in all," and what becomes of his maddened attempt to relieve himself of the suspicion of an effort to speculate by smuggling liquors in violation of regulations? His statements fall to the ground as of a witness not entitled to credibility. But, Mr. Speaker, I have a feeling of sympathy for a fellow-man when I see him in distress. The gentleman [Mr. BLAIR] is embarrassed, and well may be. As I can relieve him, it is my duty to do so, especially so when I have no disposition to treat any member unjustly. But it is such relief as is experienced by the condemned criminal when suspense is removed by the sentence of condemnation. Not believing he [Mr. BLAIR] would be able to procure from Mr. Bonner the statement he desired and which is necessary to sustain him in the assertion which he made on the 9th instant, I volunteered to correspond with Mr. Bonner. One result is a letter from Mr. Bonner, which is as follows:

ST. LOUIS, March 17, 1864.

SIR: I have read with great surprise the remarks of General F. P. BLAIR, JR., as reported in the Congressional Globe of the 9th instant. The language used by him appears to have been used for the purpose of relieving himself from the odium of a transaction in which he was engaged known in common parlance as "Blair's liquor speculation," and appears in the Globe as follows:

"Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I ask my colleague if he does not know that the order which he has quoted here was a forgery committed by one of Mr. Chase's agents, and that its publication was procured by another of Mr. Chase's agents, who knew it to be a forgery, in a paper which was in the pay of Mr. Chase. The whole thing can be traced to malice and malevolence. It is acknowledged now to have been a forgery on the part of those two agents of Mr. Chase.

"I was in the field doing my duty when these miserable miscreants committed this forgery which the gentleman parades here. I suppose he has seen the denunciation of that pretended order as a forgery in a St. Louis paper, and he may have all the credit he can get for circulating the forgery of Mr. Chase's agents.

"Mr. McCLEURG. Will my colleague give us the name of the person he alludes to?

"Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I allude to Mr. Bonner.

"Mr. McCLEURG. I have seen the printed correspondence on this subject between the gentleman's friends and the friends of the Treasury Department, and I am confirmed in the belief that I have given the fair and correct interpretation of this whole matter. I shall, with great pleasure, at any time acknowledge the error if the gentleman will convince me of it; but he does not convince me by the remarks he has now made.

"Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I tell the gentlemen that I have the admission of Mr. Bonner himself that he knew it was a forgery at the time he published it.

"Mr. McCLEURG. If the gentleman will get his written admission and produce it to me, I will withdraw and retract what I have said about this matter."

Now these are the simple facts of the case: On the 10th day of July, 1863, I received the appointment of Assistant Special Agent of the Treasury Department and entered upon the discharge of the duties of my office on the 20th of that month. By reference to the books and original papers on file at the Custom House it appears that one Michael Powers, who for many years past has been and still is a warm personal and political friend and partisan of General Blair, came to St. Louis with a power of attorney purporting to be signed by General Blair and the members of his staff, for a quantity of liquors, segars, &c. The purchase was made some time in June last, of Mr. David Nicholson, and amounted to \$8,651. On this amount the Government tax of five per cent. was paid, and on the 15th day of June, 1863, a permit for the shipment of the merchandise was obtained from Mr. R. J. Howard, collector of the port of St. Louis, who is a devoted personal friend and partisan of General Blair, and has been so for many years. This merchandise was shipped on the steamer *Gladiator* about the date of the permit. These facts becoming known led to several anonymous communications in several of the newspapers of St. Louis, neither of which was written or advised by me, in which copies of the original power to purchase, the invoice, and permit all appeared. During the publication of these articles, and for months afterwards, I never heard the genuineness of the papers questioned, although General Blair, for a portion of the time at least, was in St. Louis. Some time after these publications, Mr. R. J. Howard told me that one of General Blair's staff told him that one word in the power of attorney authorizing Powers to purchase the liquors, also the last item for canned fruits, had been fraudulently inserted after it was signed.

At the earnest solicitation of several of the friends of General Blair, I published the following card, to wit:

Editors Missouri Democrat:

I am requested by personal friends of F. P. Blair to state what has come to my knowledge with reference to a certain order made by General Blair and members of his staff, on which Mr. Michael Powers obtained a permit from the collector of this port for the shipment of a certain lot of liquors to Vicksburg, and as to the forgery of any part of said order.

I will state that I never saw the order referred to until after the liquors were seized at Cairo. No suspicion was raised in my mind as to any part of the order being a forgery until after there had been some newspaper criticism in relation to the shipment, when Mr. Howard, the collector, called my attention to the original order, stating that a member of General Blair's staff had, on examination of the paper, pronounced the word "*each*," as it appeared in the order, also the last item on the order, as forgeries. Mr. Howard also gave it as his opinion at the time that the same were forgeries, and while I am not prepared to charge that any gentleman connected with this transaction would perpetrate a *forgery*, I will state that to my mind there does exist a dissimilarity between the chirography of the word "*each*," also the last item of the order, and the balance of the order.

Yours, very respectfully,

B. R. BONNER.

This is the only statement, verbal or written, which General Blair or any other person has ever had from me in relation to the genuineness of the power alluded to.

I will state further that since the publication of your speech I have compared the copies of the power and invoice as inserted in your speech with the original papers on file in the surveyor's office in St. Louis, and find no error in your statement. That the word "*each*" and a small item for canned fruits, which are the only items which General Blair's friends ever claimed not to be genuine, affect merely the quantity—nothing more.

Upon a further examination of the original papers (which I have obtained from the surveyor) I am very far from being convinced that any such alterations as claimed by General Blair were made after the execution of the power. With General Blair's signature I have long been familiar, and have no doubt of its genuineness to the power in question. Although the paper has been submitted to several persons most familiar with General Blair's handwriting and signature, I have found no one who doubts that General Blair signed the paper in question. The original power is dated June 3, 1863. On the 15th of June the permit for the shipment of the merchandise on the steamer *Gladiator* was given by Collector Howard. My appointment was made July 10, 1863, and I entered upon the discharge of the duties of my office on the 20th of July, more than a month after the purchase and shipment of the liquors. And never until in August afterwards did I have any knowledge or information of any kind of the transaction referred to when I was applied to in my official capacity by Mr. Nicholson, the vender of the goods, to have them released from seizure at Cairo.

It will thus be seen that General Blair, without the slightest excuse, has coolly and imprudently, in the House of Representatives of the United States, uttered a willful, malicious and deliberate falsehood; and now stands branded and must forever stand branded as a reckless and unscrupulous slanderer, utterly regardless of truth.

Yours, very respectfully,

B. R. BONNER,

Assistant Special Agent of the Treasury Department.

Hon. J. W. McCLEURG, Washington, D. C.

The SPEAKER. The Chair would state that if this is read as a part of the gentleman's speech it is clearly out of order, as violating the rule of the House forbidding personalities.

Mr. McCLURG. Mr. Speaker, it appears, from the only communication Mr. Bonner ever made on the subject, he did not acknowledge that a forgery had been committed by any one. He says Mr. Howard—collector of the port of St. Louis, an appointee of Mr. Lincoln, and a personal and political friend of my colleague, [Mr. BLAIR]—contended there was a forgery. And this was some time after a permit had been given for the shipment of the liquors, by a deputy of Mr. Howard. Mr. Bonner, in his kindness of feeling to one [Mr. BLAIR] who has shown himself incapable of making return, except in abuse, was induced to commit the indiscretion of saying there appeared to be some disagreement in the chirography of the order, in one or two parts. This was some time after the order had been acted upon by Mr. Powers, the personal and political friend of my colleague, [Mr. BLAIR,] and by Mr. Nicholson, who filled the order, discovering nothing wrong in it, and after the permit for shipment had been granted by the deputy of another personal and political friend. No one had anything to do with that order except the personal friends of my colleague until the "liquor speculation" became a matter of public discussion. The forgery was an afterthought, after discussion, and the attempt is made to mystify the transaction by casting suspicion somewhere; and the gentleman, [Mr. BLAIR] thinks best to throw it upon a Treasury agent who was not appointed until weeks had elapsed after the liquors were shipped. In his recklessness he [Mr. BLAIR] again suffers himself to be guided by his natural instincts, and attempts to place a dagger in the heart of an old friend, Mr. Bonner, whose proverbial kindness of heart is shown in this instance by a disposition to conceal the faults of *one he had loved*, [Mr. BLAIR,] but who was attempting to tear himself [Mr. BLAIR] from the embrace of those who reluctantly gave him up.

But my correspondence with Mr. Bonner had another result, which will enable others to see whether or no they can discover any disagreement in the chirography of that order in any of its parts. It imposes upon me the duty devolving on the executioner, whose trembling hand severs the cord that binds to life. That correspondence has brought me the original order, the original invoice, and the application and affidavit for the shipment, all which I hold in my hand, and which are for inspection. My colleague can examine them if he desire, and I would like to know, when I shall have concluded, if he deny the genuineness of the signature, "Frank P. Blair, jr.," which appears to that order. If he do not, it will require more than the words of all the generals in this House to convince one scribe that the word *each* (as Mr. Howard contended) was not written when that order was written. It was by the same hand, with the same pen, from the same ink. That all who desire may satisfy themselves, I have had these original papers photographed, and will have photographs in a few days, and others can be had at a trifling expense from the same negatives. The last item, "25 box. can fruits," appears to have been written by the staff officer, whose name is last signed. And it was perfectly natural for the appetites of the group of nine, whetted at the prospect of the excitement to be produced by such an abundant supply of choice liquors, to suggest "canned fruits;" and surely twenty-five cases were not a large addition for *each one*, who had already shown to each of his comrades that his mind was capacious enough to contain twenty-five gallons brandy, twenty-five gallons whiskey, twenty-five half barrels ale, and Catawba, claret, and segars in proportion. Michael Powers understood all this, and purchased *nine* times twenty-five cases "canned goods," and other articles in proportion.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think I have performed a duty to myself in placing this question of forgery in its true light, as it had been intimated I must have seen a different and satisfactory explanation; a duty I owed to Mr. Bonner, who sustains as high a character as any citizen of St. Louis; a duty I owed the country, to enable public men to be seen in their true colors. *Justice must be done*, though tears of anguish be drawn from the past and present friends of the condemned criminal.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri, obtained the floor.

The SPEAKER. The gentleman from Missouri asks leave to be heard in reply to his colleague. Is there any objection?

Mr. SPAULDING. I will not object to the gentleman replying to his colleague. I shall hear him with pleasure; but I give notice that after he has concluded I shall object to any further time of the House being taken up in this way.

The SPEAKER. The Chair hears no objection; and the gentleman from Missouri will proceed.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I move—and I hope the House will do me the justice to vote

for my motion—that a select committee of three members be appointed by the Speaker of this House to investigate the charges made against me by my colleague.

I pronounce his allegation from beginning to end a base and miserable falsehood. He has taken the place of the forger and falsifier, and I pronounce him an infamous liar and scoundrel. [Great sensation.]

The SPEAKER. The Chair must state to the gentleman from Missouri that those remarks are in violation of the rules of the House, as the Chair stated of similar remarks which his colleague had read. The Chair intends to enforce the rule forbidding personalities against both sides of the House, if the House will sustain him in so doing.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. There is no other fit language that can be used toward him.

The SPEAKER. Such language should be used elsewhere than in this Hall.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. There can be no other fit language to apply to an allegation so unprovoked, so false, and so utterly contemptible. I make the motion that a select committee of three be appointed by the Speaker with power to send for persons and papers, and to investigate this matter. If I have been guilty of the crime charged by my colleague, I am not a fit person to occupy a seat in this House. I desire to bring this matter to an arbitrament that will either fix this guilt where it is alleged to rest, or will let it recoil on those who have assumed to make the charge here.

The SPEAKER. The gentleman from Missouri will please reduce his resolution to writing.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. Yes, sir.

The SPEAKER. And the Chair will feel obliged if the gentleman will state in the resolution the charge he refers to.

Mr. McCLURG. I have no sort of objection to any investigation being made. I have papers now before me purporting to have been written by some officers on my colleague's staff, which I will be very much pleased to lay before the public. It, of course, will be noticed here that I produce the original order. The gentleman does not pretend to say that he did not sign it.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I do not propose to reply to any inquiry put to me by that infamous scoundrel.

The SPEAKER. The Chair must again call the gentleman from Missouri to order.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I desire that this matter may be investigated by a select committee of three of my brother members, and I desire him to bring that paper before the committee, where it will be found whether this loose talk of his be true or false.

Mr. McCLURG. I ask that the original document be examined by the gentleman.

The SPEAKER. This debate cannot proceed until after the gentleman [Mr. BLAIR] shall have submitted his resolution.

CHARGE AGAINST A MEMBER.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I now offer the following resolution :

Resolved, That a select committee of three members be appointed by the Speaker, with power to send for persons and papers and to investigate the charge made by Hon. J. W. McCLURG, of Missouri, against FRANCIS P. BLAIR, Jr., of said State, of violating the laws in the matter of an alleged liquor speculation.

Mr. GARFIELD. I suggest to the gentleman to modify his resolution by referring to himself as a Representative from the first congressional district of Missouri.

Mr. STEVENS. I suggest that perhaps this resolution will not exactly meet the question, and that it should instruct the committee to inquire into the genuineness of the order alleged to have been given by the gentleman from the first district. That seems to be the whole question.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I think the resolution that I have offered covers the whole ground. It authorizes the committee to investigate and examine into the whole matter, and that is what I want done.

Mr. STEVENS. Will the gentleman modify it so as to authorize the committee to inquire into the genuineness of the order referred to by his colleague?

Mr. WASHBURNE, of Illinois. I ask that the resolution be again read.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I wish the truth of the charge to be investigated.

The SPEAKER. The Clerk will report the resolution, and it is open for amendment or action.

The resolution was again read.

Mr. STEVENS. If the gentleman from Missouri does not wish the floor I will move an amendment.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I will hear the gentleman's amendment.

Mr. STEVENS. I move to strike out the last part about violation of law. Read it.

The SPEAKER. The words proposed to be stricken out are, "violating of the laws in the matter of an alleged liquor speculation."

Mr. STEVENS. And I move to insert in lieu of them these words, "and inquire into the genuineness or falsity of the document which the gentleman produced and alleged to be genuine."

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. That is an ingenious attempt to narrow the case down. It does not cover the case. The allegation was against me, that I had violated the law in attempting to make a speculation in liquor. I desire the whole matter to be investigated.

Mr. STEVENS. I move to add the words which the Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows: "and to inquire into the genuineness or falsity of an order for the purchase of liquor."

Mr. STEVENS. Alleged order. I do not assume it to be genuine.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. It is impossible to be genuine, for it is a forgery.

Mr. STEVENS. I want to say "alleged order dated June 3, 1863."

The amendment as modified was agreed to.

Mr. GARFIELD. I move, after the name "F. P. Blair, jr.," to insert, "of the first district of Missouri," so as to be descriptive. I want it to appear that this investigation is in regard to a member of this House, and not in regard to an outsider.

The amendment was agreed to.

The resolution as amended was then adopted.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri, moved to reconsider the vote by which the resolution was adopted; and also moved that the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

The latter motion was agreed to.

The SPEAKER. The Chair will announce the committee during the day. Under the practice, unless the gentleman from Missouri [Mr. BLAIR] declines, the Chair will have to appoint him chairman of the committee.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I hope that that formality will be dispensed with in this instance.

The SPEAKER. The Chair does not wish to act so that the gentleman can complain of his course.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I only defended the Speaker the other day against the allegations of his friends.

The SPEAKER. The Chair merely stated the fact to prevent any misunderstanding.